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SUBJECT: Argentina: Profiles of Key Anti-Kirchner Piqueteros REF: BUENOS AIRES 526; BUENOS AIRES 794; BUENOS AIRES 13 09 BUENOS AIRES 1084; 08

11. (SBU) Summary: In recent months, Argentina's social activist movements, known as piqueteros, have captured the media spotlight through their demands for greater inclusion in President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) new jobs program. This cable examines key anti-K piquetero leaders, including: Raul Castells from the Movement of Retired and Unemployed Workers (MIJD); Toty Flores from the Movement of Unemployed Workers of La Matanza (MTD-La Matanza); Juan Carlos Alderete from the Classic and Combative Current (CCC); and Jorge Ceballos from the

12. (SBU) As part of the Embassy's ongoing efforts to reach out to a broad spectrum of Argentine society, Embassies held a series of meetings with representatives of his predecessors, over fifty ended up joining his government and his allies at the local and national levels. They aligned their groups with NK because he ordered government security forces to refrain from using force against them in his government and to address their concerns. Several key piquetero groups, however, never allied with the administrations of NK and his wife/successor, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK), and instead opposed NK's congressional slate in the June 2009 mid-term elections. They also sided with farm leaders during the government's extended conflict with the sector in 2008. 5. (SBU) In late 2009, "anti-K" piqueteros became particularly vociferous about CFK's policies. According to the think-tank "New Majority," in September 2009 there were over 102 blockades in Argentina, more than in any month since the piquetero movement began in 1997. Paper-of-record "La Nacion" reported that there were 440 arrests for street blockades in Buenos Aires in 2009. Moreoever, he doubts the methodology behind these statistics, which he believes is based on selective press reports of protests. Raul Castells - Movement of Retired and Unemployed Workers -----

17. (SBU) One of the most well-known piquetero leaders and a vocal opponent of the Kirchners, Raul Castells founded the Movement of Retired and Unemployed Workers (MIJD) in 1999. An active piquetero leader for decades, Castells ran in the 2007 presidential race against CFK. He came in twelfth place, winning less than 50,000 votes (about one percent of the vote). Castells blames NK and the USG for his arrest in 2004, after the MIJD occupied nine McDonalds' branches and demanded 10,000 books and 20,000 boxes of milk powder from occupying a casino in northern Argentina. Prior to concluding the meeting with Embassies, Castells insisted that he read officers a petition of complaints against the USG. 9. (C) Castells espouses no clear ideology, but has flirted with both Maoism and Trotskyism. In 2004 "Toty" Flores--Movement of Unemployed Workers of La Matanza -----

11. (SBU) National Deputy for Buenos Aires province Hector "Toty" Flores founded the Movement of Unemployed Workers of La Matanza (MTD-La Matanza) in 1996. (La Matanza, with a population of 1.3 million in the 2001 census, is one of Buenos Aires province's largest and poorest municipalities, and a longtime Peronist stronghold.) Unlike many piquetero groups, MTD-La Matanza rejects government subsidies. Instead, the group actively campaigns for jobs as a means to better integrate their members into Argentine society. In 2001, Flores opened a community center in La Matanza, which provides work opportunities to locals through a number of small enterprises, including a bakery and a printing press. Flores said he entered politics as an ally of Elisa Carrio's Civic Coalition because he hoped to expand his La Matanza model to other parts of the country. -----

12. (SBU) The Classic and Combative Current (CCC) formed in 1994, and was quickly distanced itself, refusing to join NK's government because it doubted Kirchner would integrate its principles into government policies. The CCC has since further distanced itself from the Kirchner Administration citing governmental corruption. At the end of December 2009, the CCC, accompanied by Barrios de Pie and Polo Obrero, threatened to "create a major mess in the entire country on January 18, 2010." (The CCC, Barrios de Pie, and Polo Obrero participated in the previously mentioned national protests in late January.) Alderete openly supports the smaller farmers of the agriculture sector against the GOA and appeared at several rallies during the government's conflict with the GOA.

14. (SBU) Jorge Ceballos and Roberto Baigorria direct Barrios de Pie, a grassroots neighborhood movement of the larger, umbrella political party, Libres del Sur. Libres del Sur, which is comprised of Peronists, non-Peronists and local groups against big business, has two branches in Buenos Aires.

16. (C) While Ceballos accepts the government's claim that conditions for the poor have improved since 2003, he believes that NK seeks to limit the political involvement of social organizations. Baigorria told Embassies that NK initially included lower income and unemployed workers in the government's strategy.

17. (C) Comment: The government's relations with social activist movements will continue to be a delicate balancing act with important implications for its political prospects. With the GOA budget under pressure and with authority over the public works program being redirected from piquetero groups to provincial mayors, the "anti-K" piqueteros are not likely to change their stance. While most pro-Kirchner piqueteros are likely to stay affiliated with the government, their enthusiasm could diminish, depending on the Kirchners' political fortunes and whether benefits decline as a result of budgetary pressures and accelerating inflation. Finding financing for the jobs program will therefore remain a central component of the Kirchner government's strategy for the 2011 presidential election. MARTINEZ